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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 001550

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S SOUTHEAST: GOVERNOR REJECTS CLAIMS OF
RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Classified By: Classified by Polcouns John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4 b and d.

1.(C) Summary:, AMCON Adana PO discussed southeastern Turkey's current situation with the Mersin governor, a veteran government administrator in central and southeastern Anatolia, including concerns about religious intolerance in Tarsus (septel). Governor asserted that there are no religious tolerance problems in Tarsus and asked that any cases of such immediately be brought to his attention because the Turkish government would not accept discrimination toward its citizens on the basis of religion. He further stated that SE Turkey's "real8 problems are the economy and foreigner influence which have disrupted what he claimed are otherwise historically balanced relations between Turkish citizens in southeast Turkey over the last three decades. He dismissed the need for private broadcasting in any language other than Turkish and said Turkey's "race problems8 as asserted from Europe need to be solved through a Turkish super-identity for its citizens. End Summary.

2.(SBU) On March 11, AMCON Adana PO discussed southeastern Turkey's current situation with Mersin Governor Atilla Osman Celebioglu, a veteran government administrator with past assignments in Sivas, Tunceli, Malatya and Kahramanmaraş, provinces in central and southeastern Anatolia, many of which have seen considerable strife and host both Turkish (Anatolian Shi'a) and Kurdish (Zaza-speaking Yarsanist) Alevi populations. Mersin has a mixed Sunni, Alawi (Arabic and Turkish-speaking "Alevi" sect whose practices are similar to those found in Syria) Christian and Anatolia "Alevi" population from both the groups described above.

3.(SBU) The governor reflected on the considerable increase in use of the Mersin port for container traffic in the last two years and what he described as "more intensive use" of factories in eastern Mersin and western Adana in the last year and a half. (Note: the corridor has a Pasabahce glass factory; Sabanci Group CIMSA ready-mix concrete factory; and a Sabanci Group TEMSA light bus factory - with Mitsubishi; several regional light industrial goods distribution centers; a petrochemical plant; and several textile factories. End Note.) He said that the additional economic activity was welcome, but unemployment remained high and considerable internal migration continued to arrive in Mersin from southeastern provinces. He also lamented that the Turkish National Police and Jandarma had seen an increase in drug trafficking in the region, mentioning as an example a recent 450 kilogram seizure of heroin in conjunction with authorities from Istanbul and Hatay. "There are clearly more drugs coming through from the east and, if we are seizing more like we are, that means a lot more is probably coming through here. Our coastline is too porous to patrol well and it gets through here and heads to Europe that way," he said. He said that drug use was also on the rise in Mersin, mentioning inhalants as a problem. He also said that trafficking in persons was an issue whose frequency was increasing for police, noted that it was priority law enforcement issue for the police and Jandarma and that most trafficking through the region still seemed destined for Istanbul and involved Russian, Ukrainian and former Soviet Republic females.

4.(C) Celebioglu said that internal migration, the region's violence and forced urbanization over the last two decades were wearing the society's fabric thinner and making Turkish society vulnerable to negative outside influences which exaggerated sectarian tensions and encouraged forces that were fostering alienation among internal groups in Turkey which otherwise he depicted as having had harmoniously co-existed. Without these outside influences, he characterized Turkey as historically a "model country" where Turks, Kurds and Armenians had lived together peacefully for centuries. He repeated the shopworn Turkish official claim that many Kurds in Turkey had been successful in politics, even reaching the level of Prime Minister (note: presumably meaning PM Turgut Ozal. End Note.) and that many Turkish ministers had been Kurds as well. He then pointed to the large number of very successful Kurdish ethnic business people in Turkey, saying "just look here in Mersin." (Note: the Arslan family is Kurdish and are very successful in cereal and grain import-export; the family scion unsuccessfully ran for mayor in Mersin last year on the AK

Party ticket. End Note.)

5.(C) "The real problems in Anatolia are economic. We had no jobs and sent our workers to Europe, where they made money, but were alienated from European society which did not accept them. Some in these groups became radicalized, have lost touch with what is really going on fine in Anatolia now and perpetuate our problems by sending money and recruits who actually know little about modern Turkey to cause problems and violence here (note: presumably referring to PKK and DHKP-C activities based in western Europe. End Note.). Then European governments, who also know little about Anatolia, give prescriptions for what we ought to do to change our society. In the meantime the forces which Europeans have sheltered have caused billions of dollars of damage and cost tens of thousand of lives in eastern Turkey and caused internal societal disruption which have deprived us of the opportunity to invest in and develop that region in the way that they now say is necessary," said Celebioglu.

6.(C) He claimed to be proud of the recent changes in Turkish law, but said that they should have been made because they met the needs of Turkish citizens, not European conditions. Asked about his sense of whether private "mother tongue" broadcasting was on the public agenda, he discounted the need for any such broadcasting and pointed to state broadcasts in Kurdish, Laz and Arabic, as well as several other dialects, as more than sufficient. He said that education was a high priority in the Black Sea region where he was born and eastern Turkey and that scarce resources were better spent improving school conditions and increasing school attendance rather than pursuing non-Turkish language education, another aspect of cultural rights Kurds in Turkey seek. "There is no money for it and not that many Kurds would really want it," he said.

7.(C) When AMCON ADANA PO raised reported intolerance toward Alevi and Christian groups in Tarsus, the governor asserted that that was impossible because the Turkish government would not accept discrimination toward its citizens on the basis of religion and asked that any such cases immediately be brought to his attention. He then said that the Mersin police had been arresting "Gypsy crime rings" (read: Roma) which had been responsible for a rise in property crime and smuggling in the province. He also said that anyone who wished to change the religious affiliation on his/her identity card was free to do so and he did not believe that this was an issue in Tarsus. When asked about police harassment of groups trying to seek licenses for religious festivals or worship services, he allowed that individual police might do so, but there was no government policy along those lines.

8.(C) Comment: The veteran governor is the epitome of the official Turkish government mindset frequently encountered in southeastern Turkey, mindsets that have not changed in decades but that must change if there is to be any progress in the Southeast. The governor appeared no more in tune with Southeastern Anatolia's dynamics than the outside forces onto which he deflects blame. This discussion featured less of the confrontational tone and immediate calls for U.S. attacks on the PKK in northern Iraq which are staple features among administrators, prosecutors and police further east, but shared the shallow, disingenuous intellectual underpinning heard commonly among Turkish state officials in the region.

9.(C) Comment,cont'd: The governor's views are a perfect illustration of the regions's bureaucratic hostility to implementation of reform. The Diyarbakir Chief Prosecutor has voiced similar discouraging views on the likelihood of private "mother tongue" broadcast approval to AMCON Adana PO and indicated no interest in prompt investigation with DNA testing in a mass grave case in the province. Legal contacts also report that many village restitution claims are being rejected summarily by province courts based on the need for evidence which is unreasonable given the state role in village destruction during that period. In Tunceli the Jandarma commander continues to try to intimidate a prominent attorney from filing and pursuing village restitution claims and calling for investigations into alleged past military involvement in mass killings in that province. Turkish DCHOD Basbug publicly also has belittled families seeking investigations into regional mass grave cases as attempts to bid up European Court of Human Rights restitution settlements. Taken together, these actions or inactions, underpinned by the broader governmental attitudes expressed by the governor toward the EU accession process, demonstrate the deep-rooted nature of resistance to implementation of EU-related reforms which themselves in many cases were poorly drafted. End Comment.

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